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THE HISTORICAL ELEMENT IN PROPHECY ; ITS  
RELATION TO THE DIVINE ELEMENT.\*

By WELLESLEY STUDENTS.

1. *What was prophecy in Old Testament Times ?*

Prophecy in Old Testament times was religious instruction, given by men especially fitted for the purpose under divine inspiration. It was a declaration and illustration of the principles of Divine government, necessarily limited by the language, the civilization of the times and the character of the people to whom it was addressed. Its perfect purity, its unswerving truthfulness, its power over both the speaker and the hearers,—a power yet undiminished,—all attest its divine origin. The prophets themselves bear witness to the divine influence which possessed them and which impelled them to speak sometimes in direct opposition to their own wishes, Jer. 20: 7-9. It was a gift from God, sometimes bestowed for a short period only, in other cases remaining with the prophet from early manhood until death. Hebrew prophecy was thus entirely different from heathen prophecy which was but a reaching out after the supernatural, a human interpretation of natural phenomena, a statement of conclusions in regard to half-comprehended truths arrived at through the mere workings of the human intellect, and not the outcome of a Divine communication.

2. *Was the prophet a factor in the life of his day, working and sympathizing with his people ?*

The great prophet was a statesman—the possessor of a

\* In Wellesley College the students are separated into divisions for the study of the Bible. One of these divisions during a portion of the past year made a special study of prophecy. At the request of the instructor certain questions were propounded to the class and they were given the privilege of preparing answers to these questions. From all the answers handed in the following have been selected. The work was surely profitable to those who engaged in it. The plan of examination was unique. The readers of the OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT STUDENT, we are sure, will congratulate themselves that they are allowed to see the results.—THE EDITOR.

clear insight into the affairs of his day; a true patriot, caring enough for his country to acquaint himself with the dangers that threatened it, and so in touch with the temper of the times as to grasp the significance of the movements of the age. He was a man working with and for his people—sternly chiding their moral laxity (Isa. 32: 9–11); breaking into terrible denunciation of their idolatry, their faithlessness to God and His commands (Jer. 2: 5; Isa. 9: 13–21); but always prompted, even in his sternest censures by a living sympathy for man (Jer. 4: 10, 14; Isa. 9: 17, 21 [last clauses]). Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah and Jeremiah, are examples of prophets great in their divine mission and great in their human character. Each keenly realized the sins of the people, and even when announcing God's anger delivered the message with lips that quivered and voice that trembled with intensity of sympathy. The prophet was also a political factor in the life of his day. Not only did he act as king's counsellor at critical moments in the national history (Isa. 8: 11–15 and ch. 37), but as an ambassador from God to the king to warn him of impending political crises (Jer. 34: 2). Again, every prophet was a preacher—Jonah in Nineveh; Isaiah and Jeremiah in Judah (Jon. 1: 2; Isa. 6: 8, 9; Jer. 1: 7). The text or general theme for the discourse was given by God (Isa. 51: 16), but the personality of the prophet shaped its expression. At all times the prophet was God's agent upon earth, acting with authority in secular matters: deposing officers of the king's household (Isa. 22: 15–21); chiding the women for vanity and gaudy apparel (Isa. 32: 9–20); prescribing a cure for a king's malady (Isa. 38: 21); in short doing whatever his hand found to do and doing it to the glory of God.

3. *Was the form of prophecy dependent on and colored by the events with which it was connected?*

The form of prophecy was dependent on and colored by the events with which it was connected. Circumstances determined whether it should be oral or written, dramatic or lyric, whether it should have a pastoral coloring, whether it should be ornate or severe in style. Jeremiah's prophecies were oral or written according to the needs of the time.

The letters to the captives in Babylon (Jer. 29: 1-23) and to Zedekiah after his surrender (51: 59-64) were necessarily written. His rebuke of idolatry (Jer. 44) during the exile in Egypt, on the other hand, was oral, because called forth by a present evil, and one which could be much better reprov'd by a spoken word than by a written discourse. His style, too, is plainly influenced by the course of events in his day. There is a remarkable absence of ornament. He was the prophet of sorrow, living in troublous times. His zeal for God's honor was great. He could not stop to ornament and adorn his language. We find, also, frequent repetitions. This is natural as his subject is much the same throughout. He had the one message to deliver and he gave it over and over to a people who would not hear. Jer. 2: 28 is repeated in 11: 13, and 7-10 in 26: 1-6. Since he met with much doubt and mistrust as a prophet, he often repeats the language of the older prophets, as if to show that there was no break or lack of harmony between himself and them. Isa. 4: 2, and 11: 1, are repeated in Jer. 33: 15. So the symbols used find their occasion in the time. The yokes sent the envoys from the nations (Jer. 27: 1-11) the sermon on the potter (chap. 18), and many others show that the choice of symbols was governed by the course of events. In all prophecy there can be traced the same close connection between form and circumstances which we see in Jeremiah.

4. *Was the time of utterance determined by historical events, personal or political?*

The time of utterance was determined by historical events. The finding of the book of the Law in the house of the Lord, gave rise to the preaching of Jeremiah throughout the kingdom, and the reformation under Josiah. The earlier or Scythian sermons of Jeremiah were occasioned by the near approach of the Scythian host. During the thirteen prosperous years preceding the death of Josiah and following the reformation of his reign, Jeremiah is silent. All is well with the people and no revelation is sent to him. But the battle of Megiddo and Josiah's death are followed by a terrible retrogression on the part of the people who forsake Jehovah and return to idolatry. Then again the prophet preaches to

them of judgment and destruction to come. In the 11th chapter of the same prophecy we see the prophet influenced to preach at a certain time by reason of a conspiracy formed against himself by the men of Anathoth.

5. *Was the substance due to a definite historical situation?*

The historical events most certainly determined the substance of a prophecy. As the people fell into different sins, the prophecies were directed against those particular sins, not against the dangers which might threaten them at some future time. The prophets before the Fall of Jerusalem, (Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah,) when idolatry was the prevailing vice, continually foretold punishment. After the return from captivity, when idolatry was no longer prevalent, the warnings against it cease. The book of Malachi contains no reference to it. In times of the greatest trial and despondency, the prophets do not dwell upon the wrath of God and the terrible punishment of sin, but rather encourage the people with predictions of the coming Messiah, the purified nation, and the joyful return. According as the people showed themselves ready for and in need of certain great truths, these truths were imparted to them. The power of discerning what lesson was needed at the particular time was part of the wisdom of the prophet, the result of his deep insight into the character of his people and intimate knowledge of their history.

6. *Were predictions made because of special miraculous impartation or in accordance with certain great principles divinely imparted and upon the ground of certain existing facts?*

The knowledge of God among men, as it has steadily strengthened from a mere glimmer into a constant, unwavering, ever increasing light, has come from the teaching and example of men whose lives are in harmony with the unchanging right. This *eternal life* in the world is consistent, continual, and all embracing, never fitful and uncertain. The holy men who most nearly attained the state of unity with God, grew into the wisdom, understanding and spiritual insight which gave them truly divine power in prophecy. Predictions, the enunciation of the essential meaning of past or present, the foretelling future results from existing events

or conditions, were made in accordance with the everlasting truths which obtain in the world, and herein lies the essence of their divinity. That special miraculous impartations have been granted to the servants of Jehovah, except we consider the prophet's communion with the source of all knowledge to be miraculous, is a meaningless assumption: it signifies less, although it seems to claim more: it gives a spasmodic and uneven character to the dealings between man and his Maker, lessening the dignity and continuity of their connexion. The perfection and power of prophecy breathe forth the spirit of the Eternal, the Immutable, "whose word is true from the beginning, whose judgments endure forever."

7. *Were predictions conditioned, i. e. dependent for fulfillment upon the existence of certain conditions and in case of the non-existence of these unfulfilled?*

Prophecy was always dependent for its fulfillment upon the carrying out of certain definite lines of action. Jeremiah says; "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it: If that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to build and to plant it: If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them." We have examples of predictions that were unfulfilled in the case of Jonah's prophecy against Nineveh, and the prophecies of Zephaniah and Jeremiah concerning the Scythian invasions. The prophets spoke for the purpose of turning the people from the evil of their ways. They told what would be the result of wrong doing if persisted in, and if they were successful in their efforts and the people repented, the prophecies were not fulfilled. The conditions were changed. All prophecies about Israel were conditioned upon the attitude of the people toward Jehovah.

8. *Was the purpose of prophecy an immediate one, confined in the mind of the prophet, to the people to whom it was spoken?*

The immediate desire of the prophet was to effect a refor-

mation among the people, in whose midst he was. We find each prophet denouncing the sins of his own age, from the debauched idol worship of Hosea's time to the formal Jehovah worship of Malachi's, and prophesying punishment or reward according as the sins were persisted in or abandoned. We find each prophet facing the political situation of his time and prophesying permanence to righteous action. When Zedekiah sends to the prophet to inquire of the Lord for him, it is in connection with the impending destruction by the Chaldeans, that Jeremiah promises kings sitting upon the throne of David if Judah will but execute judgment and righteousness. With the purpose of keeping pure the righteous remnant, Jeremiah foretells their restoration and their Ruler, the "righteous Branch."

9. *Was there in addition to this immediate purpose also a more distant purpose? If so, what was the relation of the latter to the former?*

There was another meaning in many of the prophecies than that in immediate connection with the life of the time. The harmony between the two meanings is their common foundation of eternal truth. The truth that idol-worship was wrong for Israel and brought punishment means in all time that the worship of what is false must bring destruction. Israel's temporal kingdom was to be holy and her Messiah-King was to have a reign of truth and righteousness. Although this has ceased to mean anything as a temporal promise, we still look forward to the perfection of the spiritual kingdom of Christ.

10. *What was the Messianic ideal presented by the prophets?*

We may trace the growth of the Messianic ideal in the prophets. "Obadiah 1: 21 says, 'And saviours shall come upon Mt. Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.' The idea of holiness is left to the last clause, for Obadiah thought of God as an avenging God. In Hosea, this ideal is more developed and as his prophecy deals with the redeeming love of God, so his Messianic ideal expresses the love of God. Hosea 14: 4-5 promises, 'I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for my anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall blos-

som as the lily and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.' As God shows Himself more clearly to His prophets, the ideal of the Messiah takes on a more spiritual form. He is to be the shepherd of Israel, as in Micah 5: 4, 'And he shall stand, and shall feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the Lord his God: and they shall abide; for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.'

This ideal again advances and in the first part of Isaiah, the Messiah is represented as the ideal ruler, e.g., Isaiah 11: 3, 'And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth.'

This Messianic ideal reaches its height not in the earlier prophets, nor in those who wrote in the golden age of prophecy; but in the prophet who, although perhaps unknown by name, yet has been made immortal by his description of the ideal servant, the suffering Messiah. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah is the crown of the Messianic ideal presented by the prophets. 'But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him and with his stripes are we healed.'